

Bai Juyi lived during the Middle Tang period. This was a period of rebuilding and recovery for the Tang Empire, following the An Lushan Rebellion, and following the poetically flourishing era famous for Li Bai (701-762), Wang Wei (701-761), and Du Fu (712-770). Bai Juyi lived through the reigns of eight or nine emperors, being born in the Dali regnal era (766-779) of Emperor Daizong of Tang. He had a long and successful career both as a government official and a poet, although these two facets of his career seemed to have come in conflict with each other at certain points. Bai Juyi was also a devoted Chan Buddhist. Bai Juyi was born in 772 in Taiyuan, Shanxi, which was then a few miles from location of the modern city, although he was in Zhengyang, Henan for most of his childhood. His family was poor but scholarly, his father being an Assistant Department Magistrate of the second-class. At the age of ten he was sent away from his family to avoid a war that broke out in the north of China, and went to live with relatives in the area known as Jiangnan, more specifically Xuzhou. Bai Juyi's official career was initially successful. He passed the jinshi examinations in 800. Bai Juyi may have taken up residence in the western capital city of Chang'an, in 801. Not long after this, Bai Juyi formed a long friendship with a scholar Yuan Zhen. Bai Juyi's father died in 804, and the young Bai spent the traditional period of retirement mourning the death of his parent, which he did along the Wei River, near to the capital. 806, the first full year of the reign of Emperor Xianzong of Tang, was the year when Bai Juyi was appointed to a minor post as a government official, at Zhouzhi, which was not far from Chang'an (and also in Shaanxi province). He was made a member (scholar) of the Hanlin Academy, in 807, and Reminder of the Left from 807 until 815, except when in 811 his mother died, and he spent the traditional three-year mourning period again along the Wei River, before returning to court in the winter of 814, where he held the title of Assistant Secretary to the Prince's Tutor. It was not a high-ranking position, but nevertheless one which he was soon to lose. While serving as a minor palace official in 814, Bai managed to get himself in official trouble. He made enemies at court and with certain individuals in other positions. It was partly his written works which led him into trouble. He wrote two long memorials, translated by Arthur Waley as "On Stopping the War", regarding what he considered to be an overly lengthy campaign against a minor group of Tatars; and he wrote a series of poems, in which he satirized the actions of greedy officials and highlighting the sufferings of the common folk. At this time, one of the post-An Lushan warlords (jiedushi), Wu Yuanji in Henan, had seized control

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